Train Your Heart!
A Tenko Chabashira Zine

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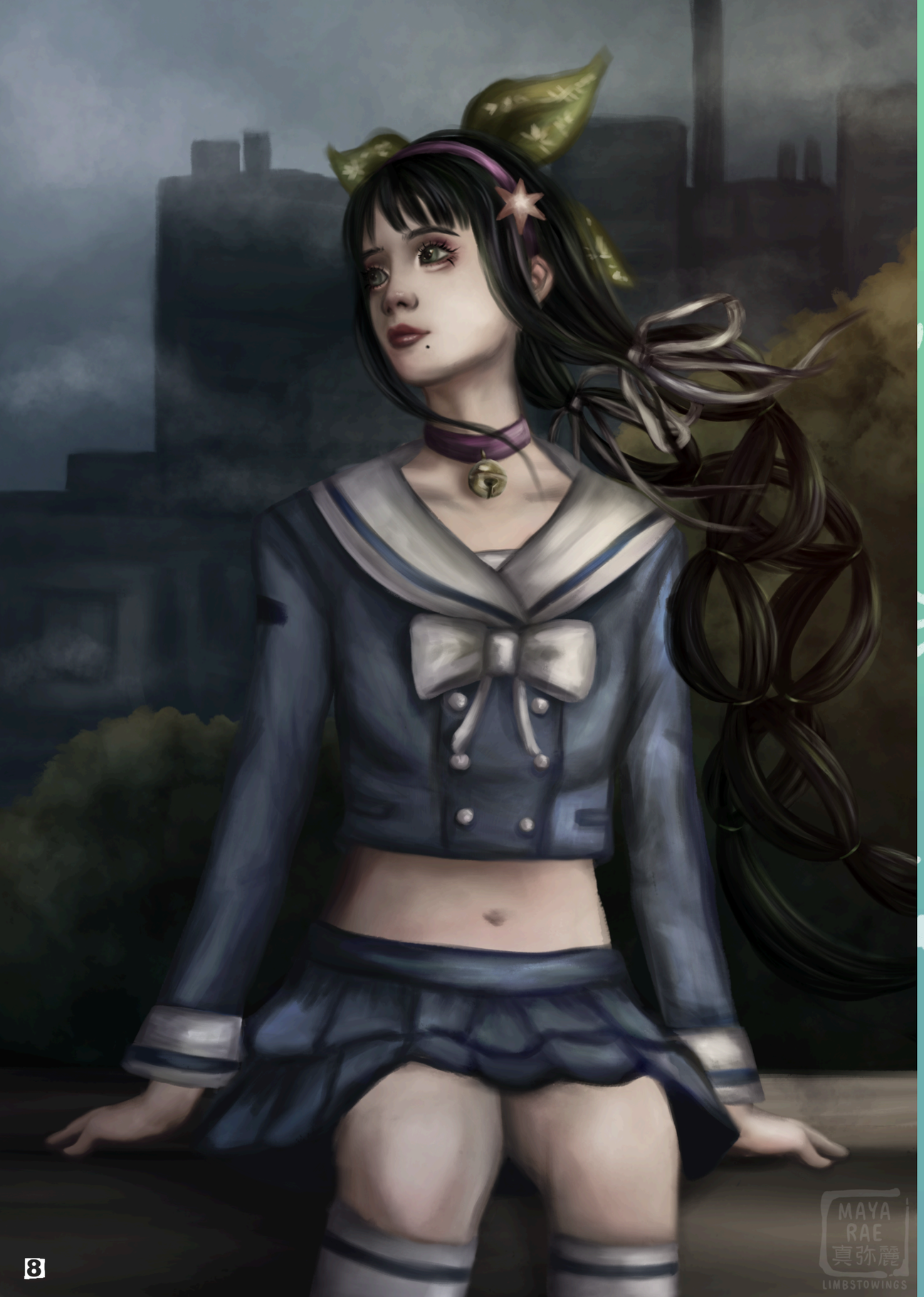


Different Names, Same Faces

Written by: rose

It was just yesterday she had given her all. Standing before a board of *Danganronpa* producers, answering question after question, what must have been thirty minutes stretched into hours. She stood under a spotlight and stared into a camera, fresh out of school in her uniform. They asked for her interests, a potential talent, what kind of character she wanted to become. She replied with absolute certainty, refusing to bend under their scrutiny, as if they were Remnants of Despair, and she was a hopeful representative of the Future Foundation.

The name she suggested for her new self was *Tenko*. She might not have had a family name in mind, but she was comforted that the producers liked the name. If she was chosen, then the young woman in glasses affirmed she was going to be rechristened as *Tenko*, family name pending.

Now, she was on her way to school. The occupants of the crowded bus droned with idle chatter. Students from different districts pressed together with businessmen. They sat in every seat or stood, clinging to handrails, their eyes making no contact with each other.

Among them, Tenko was another face. In four stops, it would be her turn to leave and walk the rest of the way to Stone College Prep. Then, she would have another uneventful, peaceful day with friends, attend after-school club activities, and return home to continue her rewatch of *Dangonronpa's* thirty-fifth season starring her favorite protagonist, Asuka Han, the Ultimate Hapkido Master. She was fashionable, confident, and brimming with spirited energy, traits Tenko deeply admired as Asuka battled through deadly class trials.

Asuka was exactly the kind of character Tenko wished to become. Her chosen name emulated such a desire. Peering at herself, she donned her plaid skirt and simple, dark blazer. The cream-colored vest was iron-pressed and wrinkle free. Tenko knew such an outfit wasn't fitting for *Tenko*.

"Next stop-"

She acknowledged the streets called over the intercom with a yawn. There were three more stops until it was time to depart. She tapped her book bag to her thigh, frowning when she noticed her sock had rolled to her ankle. The fabric bunched together, utterly unflattering. It must have happened when she sprinted to the bus stop, weariness causing her to sleep through her alarm after staying up late to watch the second class trial. Clicking her tongue, she quickly bent to tug her sock into place, struggling with one hand, when plastic clicked next to her ear.

Tenko whipped her head in the direction of the sound. Opposing her in the adjacent seat was another high school girl in a rivaling uniform. She was typing away on her flip phone. Acrylic nails clacked together as she fired off rapid messages. Undaunted by Tenko's gaze, she raised her head once before tucking her chin to her chest and resumed scrolling.

While the girl was pretty - her features softened by a light layer of make-up - Tenko leered at the *mastermind*.

Trinkets and charms of Junko Enoshima swung from the bottom of her phone. She was dressed in an array of outfits. Her classic attire from the original trilogy, her special tuxedo from season twenty-five, and a Monokuma suited Junko was right next to a lone Mukuro dressed as Junko.

When she examined the girl holding the phone, shades of blue light reflecting a pallidness on her gaunt cheeks, Tenko blurted her question.

"I take it your favorite character is Junko?"

The other girl's thumb was in mid-press. Wide violet eyes blinked, as if baffled someone would acknowledge her. They narrowed, and a sudden scowl soured her startled visage.

Tenko grimaced. It wasn't unusual to meet someone with *Danganronpa* merchandise. People were typically delighted to discuss the immensely popular franchise. Under the intense weight of her glare, Tenko's legs trembled, a far cry from the posture of the brave girls she strove to emulate.

"Next stop-"

But then, at the driver's call, the stranger grinned. It didn't reach her eyes. She dropped her phone in her lap, and she gracelessly rolled her shoulders.

"Guilty as charged. With a character as iconic as Junko, it's a no-brainer why she's the best," she drawled, and she patted the spot next to her. Tenko skipped to her side, crossing her ankles and setting her bag in her lap as she became comfortable. "What about you? Got a favorite?"

"Oh, so many," she exclaimed, dismissing her prior apprehension and extending her fingers for each. "Junko and Mukuro are fantastic. So are Hina and Sakura. Akane and Peko are just as classic. Also, Utena! She's such an icon."

She sucked in a breath. "Her death was rough. She nearly made it, too."

Tenko nodded, pursing her lips. Utena was a noble woman, fighting for a cause larger than herself. Although her character's writing and personality were lambasted as an on-the-nose reference, she acted with poise and grace up until her demise. The sheer amount of swords impaling the Ultimate Fencer was excessively gruesome. Tenko had written enough online diatribes about the levels of unnecessary violence in her execution.

Deciding to keep the mood light, she folded her hands and said, "But if I had to pick an absolute favorite, it's Asuka. She's amazing! Her spunk, her fighting prowess. Everything about her is excellent."

She tapped her chin, mumbling the name. "From season, um, thirty-five? Oh, yeah, she was cool. People didn't like that season too much, though, but it was definitely leagues better than the stinker that was season thirty-

"Right? Asuka's season gets trashed because it was a killing game comprised of women," she huffed, crossing her arms. "People unfairly complained about the lack of guys when the

setting was an all-girls school. It's ridiculous!"

Snickering, she snaked her fingers through her hair, caught her fingers on stray knots, and glanced out the window. "Guess so. Anyway, what's your name?"

Her actual name was on the tip of her tongue. Swallowing it, she offered her hand and new name.

"I go by Tenko."

"Next stop-"

As the driver announced the upcoming streets, the other girl stared at her open palm. She flicked one of her Junko charms. They clinked together, rattling the whole mess of trinkets. Pocketing her phone, she slid her hand against Tenko's palm, and Tenko's arm tensed, a chill extending from the girl's fingertips all the way to Tenko's elbow.

She smiled. Again, it didn't reach her murky eyes.

"In that case, I go by Junko," she remarked, and she squeezed Tenko's hand with gentle force.

The name wrapped around Tenko's mind. She murmured it, gazing at the placid mask worn by Junko. Up close, the upturned lips were painted in a pale pink lipstick. No other cosmetics were discernible, a far cry from the real Junko.

As people shifted around the bus, Tenko tightened her grip. If she was to live up to the name she selected, then it mattered to maintain her appearance. Even as the other girl's expression slipped, as if unexpecting Tenko's confidence, she tilted her head and welcomed her.

"Well. nice to meet you, *Junko*," she said as Junko tugged her hand free. "So, what do you like about Junko? I think she's a wonderful villain."

"Villain?" Junko snorted, a wrinkle creasing in her brow. "I guess I can see why you'd call her that, but Junko is more than a villain, y'know? Junko's in the right."

All at once, over a dozen sets of eyes shifted their way. Heads turned, and jaws dropped. Gasps arose, followed by frenzied murmurs. The calm energy in the bus was struck down,

impacted with the lightning bolt of Junko's precise declaration.

Tenko swallowed. Sweat beaded on her neck. Knowing they were being watched, she asked, "Are you saying you're siding with despair?"

"In this world filled with flaky, boring people? Yeah, Junko was right all along."

"No, that's wrong!"

Like a second bolt, Tenko retorted with an iconic phrase. Used by several protagonists, those words cut through falsehoods and misnomers. She shot upward, her hand clasping over her hammering heart. It rattled in her ribcage, desperate to break free and let her feelings be known.

Around her, she sensed the people marveling. A battle between hope and despair was ensuing before them. They didn't have to lift a finger or observe through a screen. Like a proper audience, they supported Tenko's hope.

"People can change. I'm living proof," she insisted, but Junko rolled her eyes.

"You? I don't know a thing about you, *Tenko*, if that's your real name."

The bus rolled to a halt at a red light. Gripping the railing, Junko stood, too. She evenly met Tenko's gaze, her calm statements like dicing blades.

"*Junko* is right. This world is dull. Nothing changes. It's stagnant. That's why despair has such a strong hold on people, and *Danganronpa* knows it. I always found Junko admirable for being able to see humanity for what it was." She glared, appearing like a viper ready to snap her jaws around Tenko. "But while Junko wanted to change society, it can't be done in the *real* world. No one can make a difference that matters because people can't change."

Tears pricked the corners of Tenko's eyes. The harsh bite of her words closed in like fangs through her skin. At her weakness, Tenko loathed how Junko smirked with flighty, blithe confidence.

But her beloved Asuka braved the storm of abusive words. Her

favorite characters had withstood adversity. Around her, she heard encouragement from her fellow passengers, as if they were involved in a genuine class trial. They were supporting her, the protagonist of the moment. Like Komaru, like Asuka, she stood tall and proud against an onslaught of despair, as that had been what she decided for herself when she applied for *Danganronpa*.

"You say that people can't be changed, but I can tell you have," Tenko stated, and she pointed at Junko's trinkets. "*Danganronpa* impacted you, didn't it? You can't claim people can't change when you obviously were changed because of *Danganronpa*."

Junko clicked her tongue. "That's a moot point."

"It's not! You were changed by Junko, even if it was for the worst. For millions and billions of people, *Danganronpa* is a franchise that has given people hope and made positive changes in their lives. That's why hope defeats despair every single game, anime, and season." Before their awed crowd, Tenko thrust her finger in front of Junko's nose. "If your takeaway from the series was to believe in unchanging despair, then you haven't learned a thing. I feel sorry for you."

She extended each finger, exposing her palm.

"That's why, if you reach out to someone, they'll be sure to take your hand for the better."

Agreement and applause rang out. From fellow high school students to middle-aged businessmen, people cheered for such a wonderful, sanguine display of sheer courage. She smiled, bathing in the adoration and appreciation. She knew she was right, offering an olive branch to Junko, hoping she would find the same confidence to make the right change.

But as Tenko continued down the path of her new self, the intercom buzzed.

"Next stop."

The doors opened. People mumbled and shuffled, returning to their actual lives. As they got off and on, leaving without another word, Junko hoisted her bag over her shoulder.

"It's my stop," she said, and Tenko drew in a quick breath, taking

in the soft, somber smile Junko spared, "and that was a nice speech, but I'm sorry. For someone without faith in humanity, Junko's vision makes the most sense."

Tenko's heart came to an abrupt stop. The girl glided around her, as swift as a swan in water. She melted in with the throng of faceless individuals. Tenko couldn't find her through the window, sitting as quickly as she could, but not a trace of her was to be found.

Again, Tenko was alone. She fidgeted with the hem of her blazer. Those words rebounded in her head, whispering like a subconscious sneer. It was as if the real Junko Enoshima was murmuring in her ear, and she felt her overwhelming presence pressing upon her clammy, damp skin.

She wondered what drove the girl to such despair. Whatever transpired, it was not something Tenko, in her current state, could even hope to understand.

Her shoulders hitched. She stared out the window and watched familiar buildings pass. And squeezing her eyes shut, just another bystander in the world, she uttered her own despairing sentiments.

"Darn. That was my stop, too."

Placating Plights

Written by: Warrior

There was a frantic kind of peace in the community longue, where all ghosts of the Fifty-Third Killing Game wasted their time together – waiting for the trio of survivors to join them. It was an agreement of brittle trust that kept them in alliance. But it kept them all at ease.

Until Ouma stepped out of the room.

Tenko wouldn't describe herself as paranoid, per se – she was more… inherently distrustful of a male's every move. Thus, being the good samaritan, Tenko decided she would be the brave soldier who ensured the boy wasn't up to trouble.

…as well, there was a burning admission at the back of her mind that insistently nagged every time she simply looked Ouma's way.

But, she was only going to check on him. Just that. *Definitely*.

Rising from her seat, she dismissed herself from the community longue – smiling at Akamatsu as she approached the doors. As quietly as possible, Tenko inched open the door and sleuthed into the hall. She could see Ouma a few paces ahead of her. Half regretting her decision already, she opted to tip-toe down the hall. Moments passed as Tenko matched Ouma's steps, her breath came in hushed whiffs as she sneaked behind the shorter male. She silently prayed he'd get back to his room so she could return to the lounge and talk with her classmates. *But why was she silently hoping that he would–*

"Y'know, I thought the whole 'girls stalking their crush' thing was some fictional trope, yet here you are." Ouma spun on his heel with a sly smirk on his face. He cocked his head, "...you're out of luck though, Chabashira-chan, 'cause you're totes' not my type."

Tenko froze at being caught, her body rigid. It only lasted an instant before her mouth twisted into a deep scornful frown as her nose shrivelled up, "You degenerative males, always thinking women are obsessed with you." Somehow, her face scrunched up more, crumpling into a wicked expression of disgust, "And how dare you insult innocent girls like that–! Respectable women would never sink so low to result in stalking activities like depraved, shameless *men*."

Ouma made no comment, his face slowly dropped from a grin into a bored frown instead. Still, Tenko continued, huffing as she crossed her arms. "Is that what you were doing?–sneaking through these halls to creep on a girl's room? How low… How utterly de–"

"*O-kayyy*, this routine is getting boring Chabashira-chan." Ouma chimed in swiftly. The boy looked worn out and bored. He sighed, "Can I leave now?" he pouted, "If Chabashira-chan wants to release her inner frustrations, she can go throw Kiiboy… or something. I'm *reallllly* not in the mood for this right now." He spun on his heel and moved to continue down the hall.

But before he could take a step, Tenko lunged forward and latched onto his wrist. "W- wait–!"

A full-body flinch rifled through the smaller boy's form and he whirled around and sent an irritated glare in Tenko's direction. Momentarily, his eyes snapped down to her hands grasped around his wrist and a scowl grew on his face. Glancing back up at her with fury, he lightly tugged on his wrist, "What."

Fearful the boy would sprint away, her grip remained tight. From the heat of his glare, Tenko shuddered, her fiery spirit withering under Ouma's scorn. Tenko's facade fell and she looked to the ground. Her mouth opened to respond, but she found no words could escape her lips.

Though she couldn't see it, she could feel the perplexed, analytical gaze of Ouma scanning her as he hesitantly relaxed his arm. Ouma raised an eyebrow, looking back at his wrist almost defeatably. "Hm." he mused, "Y'know, I have places to be Chabashira-chan."

This time, Tenko looked up and glowered at the boy. She scowled, "No you don't, nobody has *anywhere* to be in this place. Stop lying to me, *male*."

Ouma groaned and tapped his foot impatiently. To Tenko's surprise, the boy actually seemed genuinely frustrated with her as his hand trembled in her grip. He leered up at her, "I don't want to do this *boring* back-and-forth with you! Go yell at literally anyone else! Let me *go*!"

It frightened Tenko seeing the usually put-together conniving brat yell and squirm in her grip. The tone of his voice sapped the remaining embers of her fury and she internally cursed herself for what she was going to say, "J-just…she groaned and opted to stare at the glaring ceiling lights to pretend she wasn't having this conversation. "I wanted to…" she bit her lip, "I mean… I thought I should…"

Deciding to just expel the horrid words from her lips, she shouted, "*I wanted to thank you!*"

A beat of silence.

"Eh?"

Still fervently avoiding eye contact Tenko continued, unconsciously tightening her grip. "Just– Urgh! For what you said to Yumeno-san at the end of the third trial!" She huffed, trying to turn her embarrassment to anger, "It wasn't nice or anything–and you hurt her poor little heart!! B-but… still…" she heaved another frustrated sigh, "Even if it was from a detestable male, and even if it was… *eugh*… *you*, it was… *not* horrible and…" she shuddered, "...*kind*, what you said. It really helped her."

Ouma was silent for a moment, all the while Tenko's mind was screaming at her; *This was a mistake!* Her mind lamented that thanking *Kokichi Ouma* of all people, was a grave error. For all Tenko knew, Ouma could have been trying to *bully* poor Yumeno at that moment! What if Ouma *wanted* to make Yumeno cry? And Tenko just *thanked* him?! It was horribly, truly, utterly–

Breaking her spiralling thoughts, Ouma spoke in a quiet, monotone voice, "...can I have my hand back now…?"

Not realising she had his wrist latched in an iron grip, she yelped, letting go and wiping her hand on her shirt. She was still reeling from her words. *Why did she say that?!* Tenko felt downright *stupid* for even wanting to thank the boy! However, Ouma remained silent throughout Tenko's turmoil. And to her surprise, the boy hadn't moved.

Ouma hummed, "Was that all…?"

Tenko snapped her head up and glared at the boy. Her panicked thoughts quickly bubbled into a rage.

Unphased, Ouma reached up and fiddled with a strand of hair. Surprisingly, there was no melodramatic or crazed theatrics on his face, for once, he just looked like a normal kid. He continued speaking before Tenko could cut in with a flurry of insults, "I don't really know *why* you're thanking me…" if it were possible, Tenko would say Ouma looked mildly uncomfortable. "I mean, I just told Yumeno-chan to stop lying to herself… 'cause she was being all mopey and bottled up when she *clearly* wanted to cry or whatever." he averted his eyes, "All I did was ask 'what she was repressing'. *You're* the one who was always bugging her about expressing herself."

The threats on her tongue suddenly dissipated as what Ouma said began to dawn on her. All her violent thoughts vanished and all she could do was blink dumbfounded. "...huh?"

Ouma rolled his eyes and examined his nails, "Ugh, you were the one always buzzing around poor Yumeno-chan, never shutting up about 'showing your feelings'!" he sighed, "Personally, I think it was your death that pushed her over the edge… 'cause she no longer had someone telling her what to do anymore–her small mind just exploded!" he chuckled lightly, "All *I* did was tell her to stop lying to herself and said some trigger words that *you* probably babbled non-sensically to her before. Without you, I guess she finally cracked, that's all." he shrugged.

Tenko blinked. To her absolute disgust, she felt an embarrassed blush bloom on her face after being praised by *Ouma* by all people. Not knowing what else to do, she just scoffed. "Tch– I don't know why I even bothered with you… because you're just so… *ugh*–!" her words sounded weak, however, as her voice wavered.

The boy just raised an eyebrow and pursed his lips. "...'kay, is that all now…? You're not gonna break my wrist if I try to leave?"

A pause of silence passed and Ouma took that as his cue to leave. But Tenko spoke, the words spilling out of her mouth

before she could think about what she was saying, “You don’t give yourself enough credit.”

Ouma paused and quizzically turned his head. However, he didn’t rotate his body to face Tenko.

“You think my *death* motivated Yumeno-san, and while I can agree that *might* be true… I think you’re selling yourself short, because didn’t you do the same thing with *your* death too?”

The boy’s expression fell blank.

Tenko kept talking, not letting Ouma cut in, “Even if you’re a degenerate male, your plan was smart. And even if your plan didn’t go how you wanted it to, your death still motivated the others to end the game, right?” She sighed, “You did a lot for the others. And…” she paused, “I don’t think you quite realise the effect *you* had on them all.”

Her words seemed to stump the boy. His expression glitched for a second and he remained quiet as he slowly turned to face Tenko again. A twinkle of mirth shone in his eyes as a childish smile grew on his face, “Huh, I guess we’re the same then!” He jovially declared as Tenko’s face twitched, but the boy continued, “So we’re… what? The ‘Sacrificial Savoirs’? The ‘Character-Growth-Corpses’...? The ‘Virtuous Victim Buddies’...?”

As Ouma kept listing names, Tenko’s face dropped and she groaned, “I do not agree with any of those ridiculous names–nor am I your ‘*buddy*’–!” Ouma paused at her interruption. He glanced at her unimpressed and opened his mouth to speak again, but Tenko beat him to it. “*But*–” she sighed deeply, “.. .you’re not as… *horrible* as you seem. And I guess… that I… *ugh*, could *tolerate* your presence… *occasionally*.”

“Wow! What high praise from Chabashira-chan!” Ouma brought a finger to his lip and smiled knowingly, “It’s okay! I won’t tell the other *nasty* men that *I’m* your faaaaavourite!”

“Hey–! That’s not–!” she cried, but Ouma had already dashed away before Tenko had the chance to keep him in the hall any longer. Yet somehow, despite Ouma’s rude departure, his deplorable tendency to lie and his less-than-amiable personality, Tenko couldn’t find it in herself to hate the boy.

…she would really like to Aikido-toss him too.

Don't Be Camera Shy

Written by: mahimeghan

“Chabashira-chan?”

The unexpected call causes Tenko to falter, taking her eyes away from the ball to look at the gymnasium's entrance. The voice is one she knows, but not well enough to place—and by the time she has, it's too late, the volleyball thudding against the floor and Nidai blowing his whistle.

“BLUE TEAM, POINT!”

In the lapse between play, Tenko sees Koizumi on the side of the court, hand in the air motioning for her to come over. Unsure of herself, she looks to her teammates for guidance.

“We will manage,” Oogami says. “Go.”

So Tenko bows her head, wishes her team luck, and skitters out of the gymnasium.

Koizumi doesn't speak—at least, not until she's pulled Tenko a good few meters away and into the hall.

“Sorry for barging in on your game so suddenly, I just need you for a few minutes.”

“Ah, m-me?” Tenko stammers, feeling her heart begin to pound. “Are you sure you don't need someone else?”

“I have to meet with every student individually in order for them to choose what photos they'd like to represent them in the yearbook,” Koizumi explains with a glance. “If now's a bad time, I can come back la—”

“Now's fine!”

Koizumi stops in her tracks.

“If you say so. I'll just have you follow me to the computer lab if that's okay with you?”

“That's fine!” Tenko says in a resounding yell, nodding almost violently. Her mannerisms appear to perplex Koizumi a bit, but could she truly be blamed? Koizumi was always so competent, so respectful—

Now wasn't the time to be thinking about those sorts of things.

Tenko's passed by the computer lab before, even popping her head in every now and then when she's sure no one's there, but she's never actually had an excuse to go inside. Now that she's able to, she's all the more certain of the fact that technology isn't her thing. The lab is far more intimidating than the one at her old school, which honestly felt like a factory, machine after machine standing tall. Here, there are separate areas for each student, some decorated, some not. It reminds her of what she's heard about office cubicles. Perhaps that's what was going on here?

Koizumi takes her to a desk decorated wall-to-wall with photos of all types—pristine portraits with subjects smiling wide, freeze-frame action shots of tennis matches and swimming practice, and even a photo of the school basked in shadow, the setting sun surrounding it like a halo. The computer at Koizumi's spot doesn't have the spinning, multicolor lights that some of the others in the room seem to, but it does have all the ports. The only one Tenko can identify is the one you can stick a pair of headphones into.

In the time she's taken to look around, Koizumi's placed her camera on the table and put a little card in the “giant block part” that all the computers here seem to have. She moves the mouse around, using the file managing system to select a group of photos from what Tenko can only assume is the card.

“Ah! Those are from the game just now!”

“That's right," Koizumi replies. "I know it was just practice, but the more material you have, the better, you know?”

Tenko hums in agreement. That makes enough sense to her.

“It looks like you froze everyone in time!” she marvels as Koizumi pages her way through the photos. “But why did you

keep taking so many shots of the same thing?”

“That's how sports photography tends to work. Or anything high-action, really,” Koizumi explains. “I set my camera to take a burst of pictures as I hold down the trigger. For these, it looks like… one five hundredth of a second for each?”

“That fast?!”

“Ahaha, well, my camera can go up to one eight thousandth of a second if there's enough light.”

“Is that the speed of light?!”

“Not quite…”

A few more clicks and Tenko spots herself on the computer.

“Oh, there I am serving the ball!”

“Yep! Just what I was looking for. Do you think you'd be able to look at the burst and pick out a photo or two that you like?”

“I think so…” Tenko replies, voice wavering. “Tenko isn't very good with computers, though. Can you show me what buttons I have to press?”

“Sure thing,” Koizumi answers, bending over Tenko's shoulder.

Tenko has to remind herself to not think too hard about how close she is.

“You just have to press the arrow keys here. The one on the left takes you to the previous photo, and the right one takes you to the next one. See?”

Tapping the keys, the computer scrolls through the photos just as Koizumi had explained it.

“Okay… Tenko promises not to touch anything else!”

The redhead laughs again, finally separating herself from Tenko's shoulder. “Even if you do, I'm sure I can fix it. Just focus on finding ones you like best, okay?”

Tenko finds herself squinting, scrutinizing the minute changes between the photos. Thumbing through the images is almost like watching a video, and she finds herself trained on the ball as it approaches her fist, makes impact, and is sent in the other direction.

“Hmm… I think I'll go with…”

Tenko brings her face closer to the screen as she flips back and forth between two photos.

“This one!” she declares, stepping away from the monitor.

“That's a good one," Koizumi seems to agree. "We could put it in an article about the athletics program.”

“Are they making you write articles too?”

“Thankfully not. But I'm all by myself when it comes to the photos, so I guess it's a fair exchange.”

“They're not overworking you, are they? I'll be sure to knock some sense into anyone who doesn't value your work!”

Koizumi laughs. It's a subtle type of laugh, muffled by a hand in front of her face. “You don't need to worry, I'm doing just fine. But what would help me the most right now is getting back on track and picking out the rest of your photos.”

“Ah, right…! Tenko totally forgot in the midst of our conversation!”

“It's okay. Besides, I need to pull up your other photos anyway. Just one second.”

Koizumi presses a few keys on the keyboard before closing the current stream shown in the interface. Tenko watches in bemusement as she pulls up another set of folders, reading what she can before the labels disappear with each click.

“Wait, do you have a folder for every student?”

“Gotta keep things organized somehow.”

“I don't know if I could remember that many names… Last names maybe, but first names too?”

“Well, they do give me a list of all the students… Ah, here. Can you pick out some photos from this set?”

Tenko recognizes the photos immediately. “Yumeno-san's Magic

Show! I was wondering if I would ever get to see these photos…”

“I guess today's your lucky day. Do you think you could pick out two or three you like?”

“There's so many photos of me here…” Tenko marvels, leaning over the table.

With an awkward gesture, Koizumi invites her to sit, to which she sheepishly obliges.

“I wouldn't say it's that many. Twenty-two isn't really all that much compared to how many photos I took of Yumeno-san. And even then all the photos I took of the Magic Show were only about a third of my usual daily shoots.”

“How many photos do you take each day?”

“At least three hundred. But that's on the lower side of things.”

“Three hundred is on the low side of things?! Then what's on the high side of things?”

“Hmm… Eight hundred, maybe?”

“Eight hundred?!”

“I guess it sounds absurd to someone who doesn't do it as often, huh?”

Tenko has a gut feeling that that amount would sound absurd to just about anybody, but she decides to keep her mouth shut.

She can't help but reminisce as she looks through the photos. There's one of her putting together a paper chain, tongue stuck out as she concentrates to make sure the yellow ring of construction paper she's holding is taped evenly. Another one shows her seated next to Angie, as she paints the kanji in Yumeno's name on a banner, eyes alight in awe. For as smarmy as Angie could be in conversation, her artistic talent was truly a sight to behold.

The next photo is a bust-up of her and Yumeno after a practice run, Yumeno smiling coyly as she reaches out for the towel Tenko's offering her.

“This one, definitely," Tenko says, voice in a softer register than usual. "I mean… If Yumeno-san agrees.”

“I remember the look you gave me after I took that one.”

“Well, you were all up in our faces! I wanted to give Yumeno-san some space, and mages like her have a right to keep their secrets from prying eyes!”

“My bad, my bad,” Koizumi apologizes, though it sounds a bit halfhearted when mixed with her laugh.

“I mean, that's definitely what I thought then, but seeing this photo now… Thank you for being there, Koizumi-san. I wouldn't have gotten to see something like this otherwise.”

“I'm glad you like it. I do try my best to get the most authentic photos I can, even if that does mean getting a bit too close for comfort sometimes.”

Most of the other shots are duplicates of what she's seen before with minute differences, though there are a few extra photos where she's simply in the background. She supposes Koizumi must put every photo that features a person in their folder, even if they aren't the focus of the image.

In the end, Tenko ends up picking a photo of her making the paper chain, a photo of her lending a towel to Yumeno, and a photo of her putting up decorations with Angie.

“If Yumeno-san doesn't want this photo of her with the towel used, can you use this other one with Angie-san and I?”

“You sure you don't want the photo of you pushing the water tank? You're all alone, in focus, and you look quite strong.”

“Nah,” Tenko affirms, pushing against the desk to send the rolling chair in the opposite direction. “The Magic Show should focus on Yumeno-san's greatness, so I don't want any photos that make me the sole focus.”

“You're very considerate, Chabashira-chan.”

“You really think so?” Tenko asks, snapping her head in Koizumi's direction, face now flushed.

“Definitely.”

“Ehehe… Tenko's super flattered to hear a comment like that from an upperclassman like you…! Thank you, Koizumi-san, no, Koizumi-senpai!”

Overwhelmed by Tenko's decree, Koizumi raises her hands, palms out and waving as if to wave away the sheer aura eminated from her words.

"Really, you needn't mention it. If anything, I ought to be thanking you for taking time out of your practice to come and pick out photos."

“*Practice*!” Tenko repeats, standing up with a start. “I totally forgot! What time is it?”

Koizumi leans over the table to check the monitor. “Looks like it's 13:20.”

“Ah! Tenko's really ought to get back to practice.”

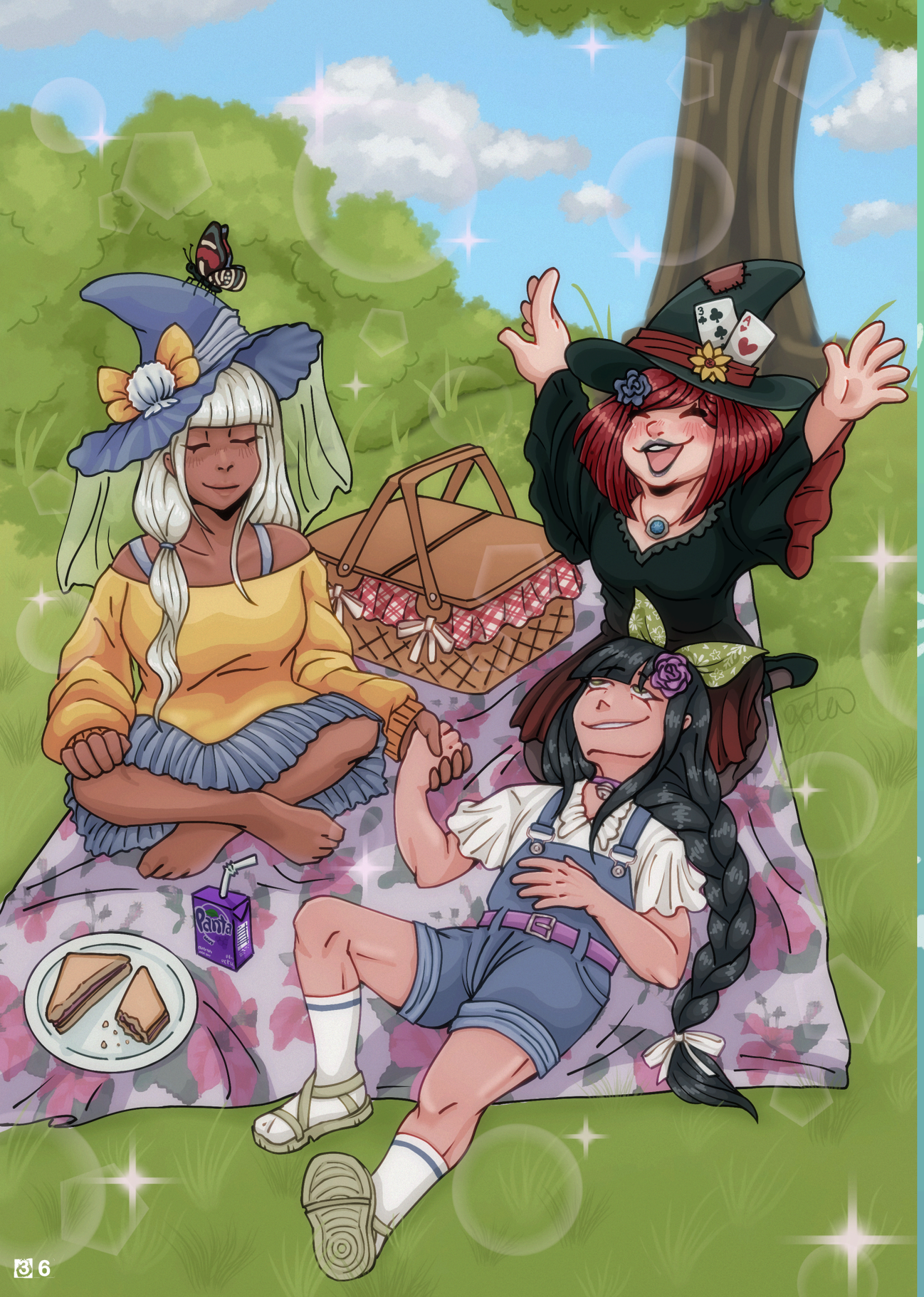
“Well, I won't keep you then. Just don't run too fast down the halls. Wouldn't want Ishimaru to detain you!”

By the time she's finished her sentence, Tenko's already at the door.

“Don't worry, I won't!”

A spring to her step, Tenko leaves Koizumi with one last wave as she leaves the room, restraining herself just enough as to not burst into a straight-up gallop back to the gymnasium.

Who knew photography could be so interesting?



Inner Peace

Written by: HinataSnow

One of the most defining traits of a Buddhist temple is the peace and quiet. Ones alongside nature's unspoiled beauty, nestled among landscapes such as mountains or the countryside, especially. Not being entirely silent even then- despite the setting's scenery seeming nearly mute, and frozen in time- little more than the sounds of the monks and shrine maidens going about their business to fill the air.

Located in the mountains of the Tochigi prefecture, Joudou Temple, along with it’s small number of residents, is one such example.

For the head monk of the temple, Yoshiro Yoshihara, each resident of the temple was a precious member of his family. Many came from rather troubled backgrounds, especially the shrine maidens. Yoshiro did not ask for details, but offered the peace of the temple grounds for however long people wished to stay. Like this, peace was maintained.

Neither he, nor the temple would be ready for the day that this peace would be shattered.

The day started like any other. A shrine maiden was sweeping the grounds while the monks went about their morning prayers. Head monk Yoshiro was currently going over the donations from the previous day when the sound of a car approaching the temple filled the air.

This, in itself, wasn’t unusual- the few people that sought out this temple for services often arrived by car. What was unusual came after the car parked, when the door opened, and a piercing cry filled the air.

“Why are we here? I don’t want to be here! I DON’T WANT TO BE HERE!”

The temple's residents could not help but turn their heads in the direction of the commotion. One centered around what appeared to be a family of three had left the car; a man, a woman, and their young daughter of maybe 5 years old.

The man looked middle aged; features of short black hair parted to the left, light brown eyes, and stubble on his chin, and dressed in a rumpled, blue three-piece suit.

The older woman also had dark hair, but it went down to her shoulders in a frizzled mess. The woman’s otherwise bright green eyes were surrounded by dark eyebags, her mouth seemed to be stuck in a perpetual frown. The woman wore a long green sundress that fell to her knees.

Between the two harried adults was presumably their daughter. Like the adults, hair dark, and fastened into pigtails sticking above her head. Green eyes, not unlike her mother, but the child was wearing a small blue dress. The most distinctive difference was that the girl was currently screaming her head off.

“I WANT TO GO HOME! I WANT TO GO HOME!”

As much as the temple residents wanted to ignore this spectacle, that was quickly becoming impossible. As the head monk, Yoshiro felt that the least he could do was address this disruption, and he approached the family.

“Pardon me. What brings you to the temple?” Yoshiro asked politely.

“Are you the head monk?” When Yoshiro nodded, the older woman said, “Call me Mrs. Chabashira. Our daughter here is Tenko Chabashira. Could you say hello, dear?”

Tenko took a look up at the head monk and declared, “I don’t like him. Why doesn’t he have any hair?”

“You don’t just ask that kind of question,” Mr. Chabashira told his daughter in a scolding tone. “It’s rude.”

“But it’s true! He doesn’t have any hair!” Tenko insisted.

“Because I shaved it,” Yoshiro explained, drawing on his patience, one honed from years of training. “Most men here have also shaved their heads.”

Mrs. Chabashira leaned towards Yoshiro and whispered: “Nothing we try works. Tenko will shout and cry no matter what we tell her. She’s also rude to everyone.”

“I see. Kids her age often don’t understand the significance of what they say,” Yoshiro commented in an even tone. “Why have you brought her to this temple?”

“Because we’re worried that if our child continues on like this, she won’t be able to fit into society,” Mrs. Chabashira explained. “This has been the hardest decision for us to make, but in the end this may be what’s best for us.”

“Then you wish for your child to learn a little bit about discipline. For how long do you plan for her to stay?” Yoshiro asked as a formality, not expecting it to be longer than a day or two.

Which is why the father's reaction was a red flag, averting his eyes as he coughed into his fist. “Tenko, please listen to the head monk from now on.”

The young girl seemed to know something was off, as she took on a scared expression. “Is this about when I broke that plate? I promise to be good!”

Without another word, Tenko’s parents walked back to their car, getting inside and driving off.

One of the younger monks who had seen the entire meeting asked the unspoken question: “Did either of this girl’s parents give a way to contact them?”

“They did not. Nor did they say if they would return.” Yoshiro heard the sound of sniffling and looked down to see Tenko crying. “So we must acknowledge that Tenko may be a permanent resident of our temple.”

The first week of Tenko’s residence at Jodou Temple was by far the hardest; the previous peace of the temple was disrupted by nonstop cries of “I WANT TO GO HOME!” The Chabashiras were correct about one thing: nothing seemed to stop Tenko’s tantrums.

Monks and shrine maidens quickly learned not to leave anything small near Tenko, as the girl had a habit of picking up anything she found and throwing it. Though, she would quickly apologize if her thrown object broke something, or hit someone.

Yoshiro's patience, honed over several decades running this temple, managed to temper his interactions with the young girl. He could see, however, that the other residents were beginning to lose their patience.

"Why do we not find the girl's parents, or leave her at an orphanage?" A monk suggested Yoshiro at the end of the week.

On the surface, it seemed a reasonable enough question. Yet, Yoshiro responded with, "If we gave up on this young girl for the sake of our own comfort, we would be no better than her parents."

The look of shame on the younger monk communicated that he understood the point. Though, it was true that this situation could not continue.

The solution presented itself unexpectedly, when Tenko asked, "When are my parents going to return?"

"Your parents left you here because they want your behavior to improve." Yoshiro had not meant to lie by omission, didn't even realize he did until reflecting on his response later.

"Then, I need to be good?" Tenko asked, looking up at Yoshiro with eyes full of hope.

"You shouldn't be good just for a reward," Yoshiro chided gently. "You should do good in the world, even if you never get a reward."

Tenko considered these words with her small face scrunched up in focus. "Then, can you teach me?"

"Teach you what?" Yoshiro asked, wondering what conclusion the young girl had arrived at.

"Teach me how to be a better person!" Tenko exclaimed. "I don't want my parents to worry about me!"

Only then did Yoshiro realize the misunderstanding. Tenko seemed to believe that an improvement of her behavior would return her parents to her. In fact, there had been no trace of the older Chabashira couple since their departure, not even a phone call or letter.

"As I just said, you should not change your behavior just for a reward," Yoshiro said, carefully wording his response. "But, I will also not stop you from doing what you want. I will offer guidance when you need it."

From then on, Yoshiro watched as Tenko would attend various temple functions, like trying to help a shrine maiden sweep the grounds, or asking the monk about sutras.

Though Tenko was still emotionally volatile, her tantrums happened less frequently when she was occupied. Seeing this improvement, Yoshiro encouraged Tenko to take on more tasks around the temple.

Which is how they all learned that Tenko was more special than anyone expected.

It happened during a morning prayer.

Tenko decided to try and imitate some prayer poses that the other monks were doing. However, the monk nearest to Tenko lost their balance, and fell on the young girl.

In the commotion that followed, Yoshiro swooped in and calmed the situation, pulling Tenko aside. "Are you okay, Tenko?"

"That looked worse than it felt," Tenko said, doing her best to put on a brave face. "If anything, Junjiro feels much worse!"

"The landing didn't hurt," Junjiro said, dusting the girl.

"That's not what I meant! You feel really guilty that you fell on me," Tenko said with a concerned expression. "And that you messed up that prayer pose!"

Yoshiro, Junjiro, and the rest of the nearby temple residents all stared at Tenko, who bashfully looked away. "What? Was I not supposed to say that?"

“It’s not your fault. I guess I let my emotions show on my face,” Junjiro said quickly. “I need to redouble my training!”

Yet Yoshiro knew that Junjiro’s training was fine, and the man had not shown his distress. Somehow, Tenko had accurately gauged the older monk’s emotions with physical contact alone.

If this ability was natural to the little girl or not, Yoshiro didn’t know. What he knew is that he needed to shape this ability so Tenko would not misuse it. Deep within his heart, the first flickers of fatherly concern ignited in Yoshiro.

Looking back, Tenko realized just how much her foster father had watched over her…but also, deceived her. A mere week after that incident with the other monk, Yoshiro first suggested self-defense lessons. She could still remember him taking her small hands into his own.

“Do you want to stay here, as a priestess of our temple?” Yoshiro had asked. “You never have to leave the grounds if you don’t want to.”

“I want to see the world! I want to learn all that I can about myself,” Tenko answered, with the pure sincerity that only a child could muster. “I hope that’s okay!”

“If that is your path, I will not stop you. But not everyone in the world is a good person,” Yoshiro said. “A lot of people living here are hurt. I don’t want the same to happen to you.”

What would become Neo Aikido started as lessons in safety. Warnings to never go anywhere with a stranger, to be mindful where she should step, to not lash out in anger. Lessons made more palatable from Yoshiro weaving self-defense lessons into them.

Then the Head Monk took Tenko out on vigilante missions. Long before Tenko arrived at the temple, the head monk occasionally donned a disguise and went out in search of crimes to stop.

The first mission that Tenko went on was small: helping the elderly with heavy boxes. Then Yoshiro took Tenko into a subway car, telling her to watch carefully. A man attempted to sneak up behind an unassuming woman and grab her butt.

Yoshiro calmly walked up to the man and grabbed his wrists, and any words of reproach the man had ready died in his throat when he saw the fury in Yoshiro’s eyes.

Tenko would always remember what Yoshiro told her that day. “I do what I can, both as a Head Monk and a vigilante. Yet there are things only you can do for women, as a woman.”

After graduating from Hope's Peak, Tenko learned of the complexities of the world, that men and women weren’t all that different. Yet, she would always carry the head monk’s teachings within her.

Despite the deception, there was no denying that Yoshiro was more Tenko’s parent than either of her parents had ever been.

MAIZONO

MAIZONO

SAIHARA CAN'T BE MY ASSISTANT FOR THE NEXT SHOW ANYMORE, SO I NEED A SUBSTITUTE.

ANY VOLUNTEERS?

ME! ME ME ME ME ME!!!

...ALRIGHT.

THANK YOU YUMENO!!!

WEARING A SUPER CUTE, SPARKLY ASSISTANT OUTFIT...!

I'M SURE ALL THE GIRLS WILL SHOWER ME IN COMPLIMENTS!

SO COOL!

WOW!

SO PRETTY!

DUN!

DUN!

DUN!

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT! THE CORRECT DOVE AND THE CORRECT CARD ON THE *TIGER CUB!*

CUTE, SPARKLY ASSISTANT OUTFIT...

First Date

Written by: Seph

Tenko was nervous. Everything was in place: she chose the perfect spot, curled her long hair in a remarkably arduous process, and packed an arguably too large selection of food. But still, she found anxiety tying her stomach in knots as she checked her picnic basket for the seventh time in the last ten minutes. *She* wouldn't have been this nervous.

Tenko found herself in a peculiar situation following the killing game simulation. Season 53 of Danganronpa had been a massive success, with her character as one of the more polarizing figures in the show. However, the real Tenko Chabashira was, for better or worse, far less interesting. When she auditioned, she pitched the person she had always wanted to be. Strong of both body and will — a protector of women, confident and proud. And she made bonds as this person, this character that succeeded in every place she failed. Namely with one beautiful redhead she was planning to see today.

And that was the issue at hand. Tenko and Himiko had a connection in the simulation, and given Himiko's reaction to Tenko's "death," this was akin to a second chance. She was a different person now, but Himiko seemed staggeringly similar. She was no longer a magician, but it was like magic how just from their brief encounters in the real world, she was drawn in all over again. She couldn't help but ask Himiko out.

Tenko's phone alarm snapped her out of her thoughts, it was time to walk over to the park and meet her date. Checking the basket one last time, she left her house and set out towards the park.

A short walk, she arrived five minutes later, and was met with a wash of guilt upon seeing the other girl waiting for her at the entrance. This, however, was quickly replaced by a sense of awe. Himiko was breathtaking, dressed in a soft pink sundress, head no longer hidden by her large hat. It suddenly hit Tenko how real this all was. No more fake scenarios and plot devices, she was simply on a date with a girl she really liked.

"Hi." Himiko spoke as a slow, soft smile spread across her features.

"Himiko! Hi!" Tenko always got loud when she was nervous, she felt her face warm as she repositioned the basket in her grip and adjusted her volume for her next sentence. "I'll uh… I'll show you to the spot."

Himiko giggled in the same style that Tenko loved so much in the simulation. Her eyes shined much brighter now though. Before Tenko could debate whether or not to tell the girl how nice it looked on her, all thoughts ground to a halt as a small hand clasped hers. Tenko's lips parted and her eyes widened. Maybe Himiko *was* a little different.

After Tenko finally made her recovery, they took their stroll in comfortable silence before stopping at the location she had picked. Himiko looked around in awe, it was a patch of grass hidden by the trees that overlooked the park's small lake. The sunlight danced on the water, while the trees provided just the right amount of coverage from the sun. It was the perfect picnic spot.

"How did you find this place?"

Tenko was flustered once more at the thought of her coming admission and decided to focus her attention on unfolding the blanket she brought for them to sit on while she spoke. "I used to come here a lot, before the game. I thought you would like to see it too."

She left out that she had never shown someone this spot before, but the sentiment must have been conveyed nonetheless as Himiko blushed and smiled once more.

"Thanks, Tenko."

They sat down as Tenko unpacked the veritable feast she had made them. She had packed a total of six different bentos, all with different options for them to choose. Himiko smiled wide as she peered at the selection of exceptionally cute foods – onigiri pandas and fruit flowers and boutique desserts all resting on sakura flower printed paper.

“Can we eat from all of them? I don't want to… I don’t want to waste any of the food you worked so hard on.”

Tenko couldn’t help but notice she was considerably more expressive of her appreciation than she would have been in the game, not that Himiko’s more quiet approach was ever something that deterred her. She wondered if it was simply a difference in personality from her character, yet that seemed odd considering how little else in her personality had changed. Regardless, she nodded, shaking those thoughts from her head.

They fell into comfortable, surface level conversation for some time as they picked from the boxes. The topic mainly stayed on their lives post-Danganronpa – those first few days where Himiko had to stay inside due to her particularly dramatic exit from the simulation and Tenko waiting to be released from the hospital where they monitored all participants who had died. Himiko spent her time learning card tricks, a skill she apparently does not actually have an innate talent for, and Tenko similarly watched videos about aikido, trying different moves to varying levels of success.

Tenko found herself feeling a sort of unsurprised awe at Himiko’s admission. It was hard, coming out of the simulation and having memories of a different version of yourself, a version you can’t live up to. It must have been even harder for Himiko, having forcibly broken free instead of exiting through death, as unpleasant as that was as well. Different sides of the same coin, she supposed.

“I wanted to tell you,” Tenko was better now at concealing her overwhelming admiration but couldn't hold eye contact, so she looked to the tree in her periphery. “I think it was really impressive how you left like that. It was… brave.”

Bravery was a bit of a sensitive spot for Tenko now, she was nowhere near as brave as her alter ego. Still, she wouldn’t let that stop her from telling Himiko something so important.

“Honestly… I’m not really a brave person. I was thinking about what you would do… if you were there still.”

Tenko pushed down how useless she felt to Himiko now and was thinking over her next reply when Himiko spoke again.

“What… was it like? Did it hurt?”

Tenko was silent for a moment. She didn’t want to concern her, but she couldn’t lie to her either.

“It was weird. I felt the scythe… and I wanted to pull it out but I couldn’t move. Then I realized I wasn’t breathing, and suddenly it felt like I was being crushed by an invisible weight that was getting heavier and heavier until I thought I was going to die… again I guess. But I still couldn’t move. And then I woke up in the connection room.”

Himiko looked horrified, and Tenko regretted going into so much detail. She hadn't let herself think of it much until now – once she started talking she couldn’t stop.

“They didn’t tell us it would be like that.”

The part of Tenko that hadn’t entirely disconnected from the experience had been upset about that too. “I don’t know how it felt for the others, but I’m glad you didn’t have to experience it, Himiko.”

Tenko felt a hand clasp around hers tightly and looked up to see tears in the girl’s eyes.

“I’m so sorry, Tenko. All I could think about after you died was how hard it would be to continue without you there. I didn’t even think… not until we left.”

“It-It’s okay, Himiko, really.”

“No, it’s not! I treated you terribly the entire time! You were always there for me and I didn't realize how much you meant to me until you were gone. I’m really, really sorry, Tenko.”

Looking into her large, tear-filled eyes, Tenko couldn’t hold back her doubts any longer.

“What if I’m not that person… the one that was so important to you?”

Himiko sniffled, looking confused now. “What do you mean?”

“My character. She was what I’ve always wanted to be, not who I actually am. I’m not that athletic, or inspirational, or even brave. I’m just average.”

“I know you’re not the same person as you were then. But… I

have an appreciation for reality now. And there were parts of you that were always too real to be made up by a program, I see them here too."

It was Tenko's turn to choke back tears.

"I want to get to know the real you, Tenko."

The date was remarkably more relaxed from that point forward. They decided to get to know each other on the most basic level there was, swapping childhood stories and discussing their favorite colors. Tenko was overjoyed to note that they got along remarkably well, she felt the most at ease as she had ever been on a date. When she told Himiko this, it of course led to questions about past dates, where Tenko had to admit she had only been on one, with a boy in her class who was 30 minutes late to their movie and had her buy their snacks. Himiko giggled and admitted she had never been on a date before, a fact Tenko would find unbelievable if Himiko had any reason to lie to her.

The sun was setting, bathing the lake in shades of pink and orange that they watched together before packing up the blanket and copious amounts of leftover food. Tenko insisted on walking Himiko home, and they kept talking and laughing as they made their way.

They made it to Himiko's door faster than Tenko would have liked, and she had a feeling Himiko felt the same.

"Thanks… for agreeing to go out with me."

Himiko grinned that wide, sleepy smile once more. "Thanks for asking me. I liked getting to know you… for real this time."

Tenko feels her face heat up and suddenly notices how close they are standing, Himiko on her front step but still considerably shorter than her. There's a sudden short in her brain and she feels herself leaning down without thinking, just as Himiko tilts her head up. Tenko's eyes close, she's not sure who made the final move, but their lips connect. The kiss is soft and tender, brief but life-changing. They pull apart, smiling at each other just as softly.

"Call me tomorrow?"

Casting Call

Written by: Kalcifer

C--- Tenko -

Congratulations once again on your acceptance into Danganronpa! We are excited to have you join our unique and inspiring program.

Costume fittings will take place on XX/XX at the Team Danganronpa studio in Nerima City. We ask that you tell us at that time any desires you may have for your character's personality and talent, as these will inform our designers' decisions. Please keep in mind that, while we will do our best to take your wishes into account, these decisions are ultimately subject to approval by the writing staff.

Thank you for your cooperation. We look forward to seeing you become part of the cast, and we can't wait to show you who you can be.

By the time Tenko made it to the studio lot, she'd gripped the letter so hard it was illegible. She was skipping cram school to be here, and she knew her father would kill her if he found out.

It was okay, though, because she was going to be on Danganronpa. She was finally going to make something of herself, just like he'd always wanted. Surely even he would see how much more important this was than studying, especially for a known idiot like Tenko.

The one doing Tenko's fitting was a girl who couldn't be older than her. She could have stepped right out of a season of Danganronpa, except that she had real talent, not just what she as scripted to have. Tenko hated her instantly. Then she felt bad about it - it wasn't like Tsumugi had done anything wrong. The only thing wrong was Tenko, boring and incapable as always.

Tsumugi didn't seem to notice Tenko's struggle, thankfully. She was polite and professional and got to work right away. It wasn't until she was measuring Tenko's arm that she finally asked, “So do you know what kind of talent you're interested in?”

“Something athletic,” Tenko said. “I want to be strong enough to protect others.”

“Like Sora Handou from season 37!” Tsumugi said brightly.

“Kind of,” Tenko agreed. She liked him well enough, but if she was being honest, her favorite character in all of Danganronpa was still Sakura Oogami, from way back in the first game. She wasn't going to admit that to someone whose job relied on the switch to real fiction, though.

Tsumugi switched to the other arm. “Well, good luck. I hear they're going for more of a prison theme for this season, so they may not want anyone that noble.” She scribbled another number in her notebook, unaware that Tenko's stomach was sinking.

It made sense, she supposed. Danganronpa was a killing game. But what was the point of any of it, if you couldn't die as who you'd always wanted to be?

...

Tenko didn't see the point of doing a chemistry test when everyone's personalities would be scripted, but then, there were a lot of things she didn't understand that she was expected to go along with. At least this one served a purpose more valuable than algebra.

The kids (her fellow cast members) were being called into the next room in some inscrutable order that only made sense to the ones who did the calling, just often enough that she jumped every time. There had been some conversation between the others at first, but after three of them ended when one of the participants got called away, that pretty much killed the mood.

So when the girl sitting next to Tenko introduced herself, Tenko couldn't suppress her flinch. Thankfully, Kaede didn't react.

“Sorry,” Tenko said. “Um. I'm Tenko. It's nice to meet you.”

“Nah, you don't have to lie, no one worth knowing is signing up for Danganronpa.” Kaede said it so cheerfully, like she hadn't just insulted everyone in the room including herself. “So. Do you know what talent you want?”

“I-I don't...”

“You better hurry before the good ones get taken,” Kaede said. “Personally, I'm hoping for something dangerous.”

Tenko blinked. She wasn't one to talk, she knew, but Kaede seemed so unassuming. “You are?”

“Well, yeah! Talent isn't a guarantee of getting a good murder - Masaru Sokuin was the Ultimate Accountant, and we all know how that ended - but it doesn't hurt, either.” Kaede's expression had gone dreamy at the thought.

“You're planning to become the blackened, then?” Tenko really shouldn't judge, given that they were all there to participate in the killing game, but it was weird to talk to someone who was actively planning to kill another person, even if that person was fictional.

“I want everyone to know who I am. The best way to get that is to do something they'll never be able to forget.” Kaede smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. “Besides, everyone loves a villain, right?”

“I guess,” Tenko said.

Kaede looked like she had more to say, but before she could, the door opened and her name was called. She shook her head. “Wish me luck!”

“Good luck,” Tenko mumbled, but she knew Kaede didn't need it. She had a point, after all. She was perfect for Danganronpa. It was Tenko who was naive, too idealistic for a killing game and still trying to pretend she knew what she was doing.

But even knowing that, she wasn't going to give up. None of this would matter once she was in the fiction. She just needed to put up with her current weak self a little longer.

■■■

Tenko didn't meet Rantaro until the cast photo shoots began. It made sense, if you thought about it - Team Danganronpa already

understood his character perfectly, and they weren't going to change anything when his return was the draw. But she'd been so caught up in her own anxiety she hadn't thought about it, not until she showed up five minutes late and already flustered and practically ran into a character from her favorite series.

She froze. Rantaro didn't seem bothered, at least, just looked at her with what could have been disdain or just simple boredom.

Tenko felt like a jerk for admitting it, given that he was literally right there, but she hadn't actually liked Rantaro that much when she watched his season. He was a little too on the teasingly antagonistic side for her. She always felt like you should take things more seriously when everyone's lives were at stake.

But then he'd volunteered to repeat the experience. To allow his memory to be wiped and himself put back into the horror of a killing game, all so that his friends could escape. Tenko had to pause the show because she was sobbing too loudly to hear it. He was everything she hoped she could be, a shield between the innocent and those who would hurt them, and he was standing right in front of her.

Rantaro raised an eyebrow. “Easy there. Remember to breathe.”

Tenko took a deep, gasping breath. “Um! Sorry about that! I'm Tenko!”

“Right. I'm Rantaro Amami, but then, you already know that.” An emotion flashed across Rantaro's face too quickly for Tenko to catch. He'd been so much easier to read when there was a camera directing your attention. “I take it you're here for the photo shoot.”

“Yes!” She could do better than that, surely. “I'm, um, I'm going to be the Ultimate Aikido Master.” There, that was an actual contribution to the conversation.

“I see.” Rantaro gave the enigmatic smile that had been his signature in Danganronpa. “And why'd you choose a talent like that?”

Tenko rubbed the end of her braid. She didn't want to lie to Rantaro, no matter how stupid it made her look. “I want to be able to protect people,” she said. “I want to be strong enough to help the people who aren't.”

Rantaro laughed, sharp and overly loud. “You know this is a killing game, right? You can't protect everyone.”

Tenko flinched. “I know," she mumbled. "It's just...”

Rantaro waited for Tenko's justification. When one didn't come, he sighed. “It's not the worst answer, I guess. Still, you know that sort of character motivation will never fly, right? They're going to insist on some last second twist to make it more interesting.”

“I know,” Tenko said more confidently. “I'll think of something.”

Rantaro considered her for a long moment. “You could always get ahead of them,” he said at last. “Offer something that will make you less of a perfect hero, something to get everyone talking about you.”

“Like what?”

“Decide that some people aren't worth protecting.”

Rantaro's words kept ringing in Tenko's ears through the entire shoot and into the evening. She was lucky that her father had stopped speaking to her when he found out she was going to be on Danganronpa; she'd never have followed one of his lectures in this state.

The problem wasn't Rantaro, who had after all been right that Tenko needed a hook for her character to work. The problem was Tenko herself, how easily she'd accepted the idea of only protecting some people, how quickly the divide had occurred to her. And more than that, the problem was the time she'd spent in Danganronpa fan spaces. She'd seen how people talked about Mahiru and Yui and Himari and any other girl who dared express a negative feeling about boys as a whole. She knew what they'd say about her, if she stood before a camera and said that girls were worthy of being put first.

It terrified her. How was anyone supposed to survive that kind of vitriol? How was she, stupid and weak and naive, supposed to withstand even the expectation of it?

job to figure out how to sell characters, not the players', and it wasn't like Tenko would be around to have an opinion on whatever decision they came to.

But right now, Tenko knew what she wanted, what she'd wanted since that fateful day she'd turned on the TV and seen kids a million times more alive than Tenko would ever be. She wanted to be someone who would die to keep someone else safe. If she was willing to give up just to avoid a few mean comments she'd never see, how could she claim to be that person?

She squared her shoulders in her best approximation of an aikido stance and began composing the email.

Tangles of Trust

Written by: JadeofBlades

Tenko hated having long hair. Okay, she didn't necessarily hate it, but after going so long without taking much care of it, she wanted nothing to do with it. She was so lethargic upon waking up and even with the help from some of the nurses, she found doing the brushing herself challenging. Added with the fact that her neck ached at the slightest crane, the thought of having to keep her head up long enough to drag a brush through her hair made her wince.

Even if she had no reason to feel ashamed (and the likelihood that she wasn't alone in her struggles), Tenko couldn't help but feel that way. It's been weeks since she'd woken up, surely she'd be over her pain by now… Right?

Well, somewhat. Despite only receiving one blow to the body, the fact that it was her neck out of all places meant having to deal with more trouble than she realized. Who knew literally getting backstabbed could cause the rest of your upper body to get thrown out of whack? Tenko sure did, and even with most of those whacks settled down, recovery was not going how she'd hoped.

Tenko groaned into her pillow, slowly dragging it off of her face and stared at the blank ceiling above her. Honestly, if she didn't have the pain to focus on, she'd be straight-up bored. Tenko's doctor stated that she still had to wait a few more weeks before going back to any intense exercises, which meant no Neo-Akido until later down the line. Physical therapy only helped so much, and there were only so many paper stars she could make before her hands cramped.

Well, it would probably do her good to get her hair under control finally. Tenko may have started feeling better, but she still seemed unsure about tackling that tangled-up beast…

Maybe walking around could help? So long as they didn't enter any private areas, everyone was allowed to move around the facility however they liked, and since she was given the okay to walk, she could do just that.

"Yeah, I think a walk would be perfect. Good idea, Tenko!" She cheered to herself. With her idea stuck to her mind, she took a breath before sitting herself up, sliding her feet off of the bed and onto the floor. The tension around her scruff flared making Tenko grimace, but she paid little mind to it as she rummaged through her nightstand. She took one of her ribbons and haphazardly tied her hair up into a loose bun, soon grabbing a green beanie to tuck that bun under. As much as Tenko despised having to wear that thing, she was not going to walk out of this room looking all crazy… Even if it didn't matter all too much.

Shutting the drawer back into place, she walked over to the wall mirror and gave her appearance a quick glance over, brushing off any wrinkles in her ruffled skirt to make her look… Somewhat put together. Whether she was or not was up for debate, but for now, this would have to do. Tenko sighed, though did her best to straighten herself up with a deep breath as she stepped from the mirror to her door, pulling it open and stepping outside. Seeing no one else around, she closed the door behind her and began her careful walk through the hall, her socked feet gripping the solid floors as she did so.

Tenko didn't have much of an idea on where to head first, so she opted to swing by the common room to see what was going on there. Sometimes the staff will put together activities for anyone to join in on, while others will just hang out and do things on their own. She had no clue about who exactly would be out and about like she was, but as long as someone like Korekiyo wasn't there, she didn't worry.

Well, last she had heard about him, it didn't seem like he was doing too good… Whatever. Tenko shook the thought from her head before she could finish it, not wanting to let that horrendous male take hold of her mind anymore than he did. Turning the corner, she reached the entrance doors and gently pushed one open, getting a look inside of the common room. She stepped in and let the door sway behind her, thinking the space was empty until she got a look at the seating arrangement in the center.

A tall figure sat on the middle couch, and with their tan skin and green hair, it was clear to see just who it was: Gonta Gokuhara. Tenko hasn't gotten a chance to see much of him around, though seeing the state he was in… She wasn't surprised. Gonta looked so tired, slumped against the backing, and his eyes looked almost empty. It was a feeling she could definitely relate to. Part of her thought of leaving him be, but before she could take a step back, Gonta's eyes flicked over her.

"Ah, Tenko-" He blinked, coming to his senses as he straightened himself up and positioned a smile on his face. "He sorry, Gonta not realize you were there for a moment."

"Oh, i-it's okay!" Tenko grinned back. She had no idea if he was trying to force his content or not, but it was probably best to go along with it. "I just wanted to stop by and see if anything was going on here."

"Ohh, it pretty quiet here. Gonta wanted to get out of his room for a bit, so he decided to watch the rain from here. "

"I see, that's always nice to do on a day like this."

Gonta nodded, and they both went silent after that. It wasn't necessarily out of not knowing what to say next, just if it should be said, how awkward… Thankfully, Gonta eventually made the first move and shifted closer to the other end of the couch. "Did you want to sit down?"

Right, sitting. That's a good idea. Giving him a quick thank-you, Tenko sat down on the couch, somewhat making herself comfortable while still maintaining the space between them. A TV stood before them, though the windows behind it were large enough to see outside. Sure enough, rain dripped down the glass as it poured. So relaxing…

"Um… How are you doing?" Tenko asked, working up the nerve to keep the momentum going. She had no idea why talking to Gonta made her nervous. Well, he's a man of course, but compared to how horrendous some of the others could get, he was easily the least degenerate of them all. Even so, Tenko hasn't talked to him in general, and after everything that's happened was he still even his same self?

"Oh, Gonta doing fine, as fine as he can be." He chuckled, his voice resonating at a softer, genuine tone. Well, maybe partially genuine, but it's clear that he's trying his best despite the odds. "How have you been?"

"Good, good! Just trying to move through each day facing forward!" Tenko replied, doing her best to return the positivity. Ugh, she could feel the creases forming around her smile, it felt so… Forced, and she never liked having to force something like that. Could he even tell? Tenko always struggled with controlling her facial expressions, meaning she'd end up giving off the wrong vibe or revealing more than intended… Like now.

"Ah, are you sure you feeling okay?" Gonta tilted his head, a hint of concern over his face. Tenko perked up, though the words "of course" hung on her tongue, and yet she hesitated. No, she wasn't okay, and it was clear to both of them, but could she say that to him? Could she trust him enough for that?

"… No, not really." She sighed, slumping against the cushions. "Sorry, I was hoping I could just power through it, but I guess it's not working, huh?"

They both chuckled, and Gonta offered her a sympathetic look.

"It okay, he understand that feeling all too well…" He nodded. "Was there something bothering you? You not have to share it, of course, but… He can do his best to listen if you need someone to talk to."

Even after going through so much, Gonta still did his best to be a gentleman… As much as males made Tenko sneer, she had to admit the consideration was admirable.

"Thanks, Gonta… I guess it's just- I don't know, I feel like I should be over all of this by now." Tenko gestured to herself. "I mean, my neck has gotten better! But it's still so sore that keeping my head takes so much energy. It's why I'm wearing this hat so my hair doesn't look like a mess, and yet I already am one…"

"Huh? You not a mess, it look pretty!"

"Does not! It highlights my wrinkles like a grandma!"

“Um- well, grandmas are very nice!”

“I mean, true… But that’s besides the point!” Tenko retorted. “I won’t mind wearing hats more, it’s just… I haven't been caring for my hair much since all this started, and I have no idea how to start.” She sighed, slumping back against the couch. She winced as her neck tapped against the cushions more rough than she wanted, but all she could do was let it stiffen. It felt almost pathetic that Tenko, Miss Throws-People-Around-and-Hits-Things, was sitting there crumbling under some stupid neck pain. Then again, she never handled pain very well…

She turned to gaze back at Gonta who had a thinking look on his face, and for a split second it seemed as if he wanted to say something, but hesitated.

“Were you going to say something?” Tenko asked.

“Umm, yes, but Gonta not sure if it would be a good idea...”

“Well, share it anyways! You always let your doubts get the better of you, you shouldn’t let them beat you down so much.”

Okay, forward… But she wasn’t wrong. Gonta glanced at his knees, lightly tugging at a loc of his hair before finding the nerves to speak again.

“Well, Gonta was thinking he could help brush your hair for you so you not have to do it all yourself, but he wasn’t sure if you wanted that considering…” He trails off, but eventually Tenko catches on to what he meant by that.

Gonta was a male, and Tenko did not like males. She despised them, even, and made that very clear during the simulation. Added with the fact she was killed by one, it was safe to assume she wanted nothing to do with them.

“Ah, right… I mean, murder isn’t right no matter what, but I understand why you did it. You were stuck between letting a friend potentially die and protecting them. I… I get it.” She uttered, running her fingers over her skirt. “I can’t really sit here and blame you for what you had to do when I did the same for Himiko in a way, you know?”

“Gonta suppose you right… It just feel like he should be helping

the others, b-but he can’t. If he wasn’t able to protect everyone in the game, how is he supposed to do it now? He doesn’t want to mess up, or risk hurting anyone agai-”

“Hey!”

Before Gonta could shrink back any further, Tenko reached over and grabbed his hand.

“Chin up, Gonta, you shouldn’t put so much pressure on yourself to do everything! It may not seem like you’re doing a lot now, but the fact that you’re willing to make things right says a lot. A lot more than whatever some males do…” She sneered, though softened her expression. “But if you’re really worried about how people might feel about you, I’d say you’re the one man I would put my trust in the most out of everyone here.”

Gonta blinked, glancing to her with surprise. “You… Really mean that?” He asked, to which Tenko nodded.

“As long as you keep your word on being a gentleman, I’ll keep my word on that.” She grinned, lifting her hand up to hold out her pinky. Realizing what she was doing, Gonta took his own hand and hooked his finger around her’s.

“Yes, Gonta promise that he will do his best for everyone and himself. He won’t let you down!”

“That’s the spirit!” Tenko beamed. Letting go, she hopped off the couch with renewed energy and darted off, turning back to wave over Gonta. “Come on, then, let’s tackle this ‘do like a footballer!”

Eventually the two found themselves in Tenko’s room, arranging a spot in front of the mirror to set things up. It mostly consisted of Tenko finding a comfortable enough chair to sit on that allowed Gonta to reach her hair from behind it from where his wheelchair stood. With a flipped trashcan acting as a little table for the hair supplies, they were able to get started right away. Tenko did her best to remain still as Gonta evaluated the state of her hair, taking the brush she had and started to work through some of the tangles. He seemed nervous to be doing this, but with Tenko’s assuring look, he slowly found his groove.

“Did you have a certain hairstyle in mind?” He asked, peeking into the reflection to look at her.

“Hmm, not really. A braid or two would be nice!”

“Yeah? It been a little while since he done braids, but Gonta sure he can do up one for you.”

“Thanks!” Tenko smiled, gently bouncing her leg in place. “Do you braid your own hair? I don’t think I’ve ever seen it up before…”

“Sometimes, mostly if Gonta really busy at his workspace or outside. His grandma helped him take care of his care mostly, and once Gonta got old enough he started doing it himself.” Gonta replied. “It took a long time to get back into doing his hair again after… Everything.”

“You too, huh? I guess that’s the curse of having long hair.”

“Hehe, it seem so.” Gonta giggled. “But it not so bad now! His hair a lot more easier to take care of now that it shorter.”

“Yeah… Wait- shorter?”

Gonta nodded, and after setting the brush down on his lap he slipped his hand behind his neck and lifted one half of his hair to the front, letting it fall to the front. Instead of it reaching down his back, the ends of his hair came up to his shoulders.

“What!?” Tenko shouted out, her eyes going wide. “How did I not notice sooner? It looks great!”

“Ehe, thank you…” Gonta smiled. “One of the nurses offered to do it for him since it was getting difficult to work with by himself. He not used to it being so short, but it much easier now!”

“I can imagine! Maybe I should see about getting a trim myself. Was it Ms. Hagakure that did it?”

“Yes, she very nice! Gonta sure she won’t have a problem helping you if you ask her.”

Through their chatter about the staff, Gonta resumed his detangling task and managed to brush through the entirety of

Tenko’s hair. She knew Gonta had experience with doing updos, but she didn’t expect for her to come out as smooth as it did. Then again, maybe it’s just been so long since she had last done a thorough job herself…

But it makes sense when she comes to think about it. Hairstyling skills aside, Gonta’s hands were gentle when put to intricate work. Scarred and strong, but gentle. The way his fingers laced and moved around her hair reminded Tenko of how those little spiders would weave together their silk to create a web. Despite how scary they were, they always looked so peaceful.

Gonta was like a spider in a way… Big, fearsome when threatened, but kind when treated well. Maybe that was why he liked bugs so much.

“Ah- sorry, did he pull too much there?”

“Huh? Oh, no, you’re fine!” Tenko snapped out of her thoughts, readjusting her seating. “You’re really good at this.”

“Thank you, he hope it not come out too bad.” Gonta hummed. “Did you want any certain colors?”

“Umm, I think pink to orange would be nice! Hold on-” Tenko grunted, rummaging through her little bag of cosmetic things and pulling out a handful of bands to hand over to Gonta. With the bands equipped Gonta gave a last push and braided her hair together. Tenko couldn’t help but snort at his expression, the wrinkles cementing in between his brows and down his nose made him look so serious. (She thought her nose was the only one that also did that…)

When the braid came together Gonta was finally down with her hairdo, and with a sigh he set his hands down and wheeled himself back.

“Here we go! Is this okay?” He asked, sliding Tenko a hand mirror once she got up to take a look. She turned around and angled the mirror to see her backside, gasping upon seeing the final look.

“Eeek! It’s so pretty, Gonta!” She beamed, practically hopping in place with joy. “You did so well even though it’s been a while.”

“You really mean that?”

“Of course! I mean, it’s a lot better than what I probably would’ve done myself.” Tenko admitted, sweeping her hand over the braid. “Well, whenever I need someone to do my hair, I’m gonna call on you from now on!”

They both laughed warmly, and for once since she’s seen him, Gonta actually looked proud of himself.

“If that the case, then he suppose he wouldn’t mind that at all.”

merch

Emotes by Lava/Leon/Logan

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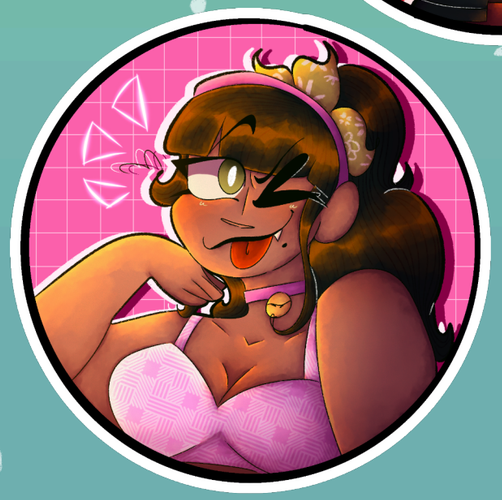

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thanks for having me! i'm glad i could add a little tenko goodness to this full course chabashira meal! **-rose**

I adored being part of this amazing project! **-Phosketch**

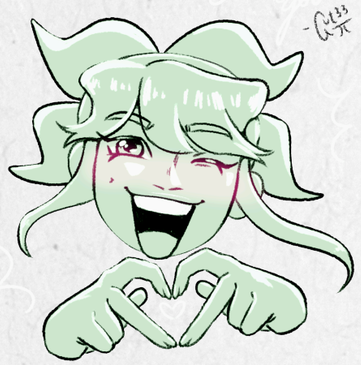
I want to thank all contributors, mods, and supporters for making this project great! I love Tenko so much and I'm so happy that others wanted to join me on this little project to celebrate her!

Please check out our credits and support our amazing writers and mods! **-thefloralpeach**

thank you so much for having me here!! i like to think thisll be a nice send off from the dgr fandom as a whole… im glad to draw my blorbos for the last time in a while! -**tatzlewurrm**

Let's go lesbians let's go!! - **erbezdiez**

TENKO CHABASHIRA FANS LETS GO!!! **-chibigaia**



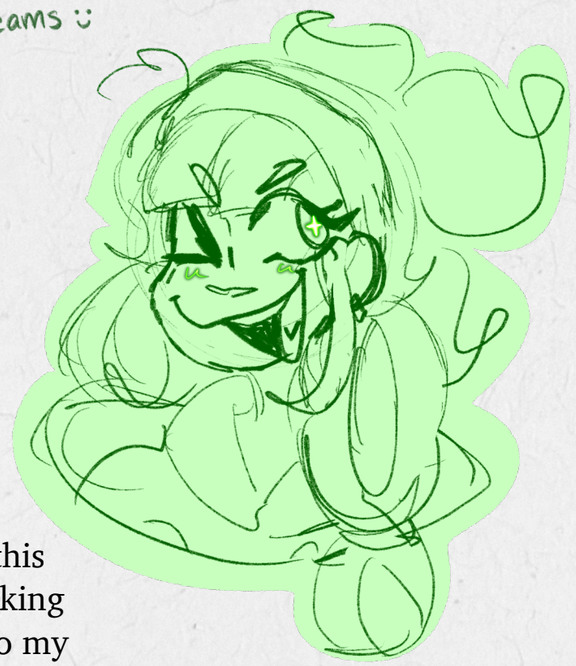
It has been a pleasure working with all these talented people! Thank you for having me! :3 - **Warrior**

I'm so grateful to have been part of this project! Thank you so much for having me. **-Cat**

I will aspire to be a heroine of justice, just like Tenko! May we all aspire to her example! - **HinataSnow**

what's the password? **-rainbow.cheshire**

Thanks to all those who were able to get a copy of the zine! I haven't written Danganronpa in a while, so I hope my piece doesn't look too out of place. Really honored that the mods let me in ♡ **-mahimeghan**



Thank you for viewing this zine!! I had a BLAST working on it! This one goes out to my fellow sapphics :] **-Mango**